

I am writing to OPPOSE HB 2541. I am a practicing ophthalmologist in Oregon, with offices in Portland and Seaside for more than 20 years. I have significant concerns about HB 2541

Optometrists are an important part of routine eye care. They are friends of ophthalmology, and we work as a team. They are experts in refractions—prescribing glasses, and in contact lenses. They do not have the training or expertise in their schooling to be able to safely perform injections with needles or any laser or surgery. The eye is very delicate and all injections of any type near it carry great risk. Just as importantly, they do not have adequate training to decide when to have surgery, or if surgery is needed.

HB 2541 needlessly places patient eye safety at risk by allowing optometrists to perform ophthalmic surgery- eyelid surgeries, refractive surgeries, surgeries involving needles, puncture of the cornea in emergencies - with multiple modalities such as scalpels, lasers, needles, ultrasound, ionizing radiation and by burning and freezing tissue. It would also likely allow optometrists to perform hundreds of different types of eye surgeries because of the way it is drafted. It is not a "limited" surgery bill restricted to a "few uncomplicated" eye surgeries.

There are no shortcuts for learning how to safely perform surgery. Surgical expertise cannot be obtained in the current optometric curricula or in an "add-on" training course.

HB 2541 also removes important language from statute that requires optometrists to consult with ophthalmologists glaucoma cases. Glaucoma is a potentially blinding condition and needs to be appropriately managed with an ophthalmologist. If glaucoma is mis-managed, the consequences include lifelong blindness. Optometrists do not have complex glaucoma training; it is important that they consult with an ophthalmologist for glaucoma cases.

All ophthalmologists are medical doctors who train for four years in medical school, perform a one-year hospital internship, and train for 3-4 additional years in an ophthalmology surgical residency program, and often a one-year fellowship. This totals to more than 17,000 of hours training before they can treat patients on their own. Ophthalmologists' training provides not only technical skills, but just as importantly, it instills the judgment to determine when not to operate.

I recall an optometrist who referred patients to me several years ago, and who I considered well educated, telling me over dinner that she couldn't wait to go "zap zap zap!" to do laser glaucoma surgery on her patients. On numerous occasions, this same optometrist was mis-diagnosing glaucoma (the patients did not have glaucoma), or underdiagnosing glaucoma (missing it when she referred for cataract evaluation). If she were able to go "zap zap zap!" on the "glaucoma" patients who in fact did not have glaucoma, they would be getting a dangerous unnecessary procedure.

The fact that optometrists-non-physicians-would be able to perform all the surgeries authorized in this bill without ever having completed medical school and surgical residency is alarming and places all Oregonians at severe risk of creating two unequal standards of care. Please vote NO on HB 2541. This bill is a serious threat to patient safety.

Please let me know if I can answer any questions about this bill. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

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